

THE  
DUTIE  
AND  
DANGER  
OF  
SWEARING:

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Opened in a Sermon preached at YORK  
February 3. 1655. the day of Swearing  
the Lord Maior.

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By Edward Bowles *M: A. Preacher of the*  
*Gospel there.*

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*Zach. 5. 4.*

And I will bring forth *the Curse*, saith the Lord of Hosts, and  
it shall enter into the House of the Thief, and into the House  
of him that sweareth falsely by my Name: and it shall remain  
in the midst of his House, and shall consume it, with the  
Timber thereof, and the Stones thereof.

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THE  
DUTY

DANGER

SAVING

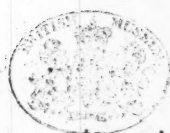
THE  
LIFE OF  
THE  
SAVING

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To the Honourable Stephen Watſon Lord Maior,  
the Aldermen and the Common Counſell of  
the ancient Citie of York.

Honoured and beloved,



I haſt pleaſed the Lord of the  
Harveſt in his wiſe and good  
Providence, to allot my Work  
and Service (if it be worth the  
name of Service) to that Citie  
which God haſt made not onely  
your habitation, but alſo your  
charge; I am pleaſed with my  
lot, not onely as it is from the

Lord, but as it is among you: I muſt acknowledge  
(and hereby do) that I have found that affection and  
reſpect from you as becometh a Miniſter of Chriſt, and  
I have endeavoured to give you a teſtimony, that I  
have not ſought my own profit, but the profit of ma-  
ny, that they might be ſaved, (if I may uſe the words  
of ſo great an Apoſtle concerning my ſelf) I have  
been induced partly by way of acknowledgement and  
reſpect, but eſpecially by the ſenſe of my duty, as a  
Miniſter, to offer to your reading and conſideration the  
ſubſtance of a Sermon lately preached among you,  
which I hope (through Divine bleſſing) may be uſeful  
to you. You who are awakened cannot but be ſenſible  
how eaſily, and how quickly the Word ſpoken ſlips

A

from

from you. It is soon gone from us who study it, and write it, and speak it; you have lesse advantage to retain it, who hear it but once, unlesse the peculiar Promise and Blessing made to the Word Preached, do befriend you. I am jealous over you (I hope) with a godly jealousie, least through inadvertency of mind, unfutableness and unprepardnesse of heart, earthlinesse of affection, seconded with Satans depths and devices, this counsell given you concerning Oathes may be forgotten. I know you have almost daily need to consider of this subject, being frequently called to actions relating thereunto, and it is now in your power daily, or at least frequently, to peruse it: If you walk in the violation of the Oathes of God that are upon you, it will not be charged upon me, I have delivered my own soul, and endeavoured to deliver yours. I have but two words further to speak unto you at this present; First, that you would more frequently and diligently attend the preaching of the Word, *The Power of God unto salvation*. It pleaseth God our of his bounty and good will to you, to afford you besides the publique Ordinances on the Lords day, a weekly Lecture, which I apprehend to be very much neglected, and I have often heard the paucity of hearers laid as a reproch upon the Citie, by well disposed strangers. I pray consider your selves and *those that are sorrowfull for the fallen assembly to whom the reproach of it is a burthen* Zeph. 3. 18. You may plead our unworthinesse who preach unto you, but that Plea I doubt will not be admitted at the great Barr; there is not the meanest of the Ministers of Christ by whose labours you might not profit, if the defect were not in your own hearts.

Remember

Remember that Divine Institution and Blessing are the main advantages in hearing the Word, nor the Gifts of the Speakers, or the capacitie of the Hearers. God is pleased most frequently to concurr with the plainest, (I had almost said the meanest) gift, in the conversion of men, that the glory might be of God, and not of men. I am sure you cannot plead want of leisure, through multitude of trading & worldly employment, I wish it were more; and truly I think there is no better way to help it, then to deal liberally with God in publike Duties. First, he hath secured you that you shall be no loosers, by that promise made to the Israel of God, *Neither shall any man desire thy Land* (that is, thou shalt sustain no dammage, the Lord is thy security) *when thou goest up to appear before the Lord thy God.* Exod 34.24. Nay, I think you may safely applie that passage of the Lord to his people, *Hagg. 2.18. Consider the day that the foundation of the Temple was laid, consider it, from this day will I blesse you.* Trye the Lord, or rather trust the Lord. You complain of great decayes, and they are visible; *You Sow much, and bring in little, &c. Consider your wayes,* Hagg. 1.6,7. whether you be not defective in that which concerns the House of God. The second is this, that you would studie by all means to preserve peace and unirie among your selves, by delivering up unto perpetuall oblivion all inveterate envies and enmities; to that end that Magistrates would equally and gently (as to Brethren) administer justice, (I mean onely such a gentlenesse as to execute the Law with a Gospell spirit) that the people would submit themselves in the fear of God, & nor wear out the spirits of their Rulers by their cumbrance and strife; but turn some of their complaints into prayers,

\* 1 Tim 2. 15, 2

to which they are obliged by the sacred Rule\*. It is easier  
to blame then understand the work and weight of Magi-  
stracy and Ministry, especially when they have to deal  
with a people that are poor & foolish, and know not the way  
the Lord, nor the judgement of their God, Jer. 5. 4. And  
lastly, it will tend much to unity, that you be very care-  
full what Ministers are planted among you, such as  
give some evidence of the Spirit of God dwelling in  
them, whose fruits are love and peace; such as are desir-  
ous of Reformation, least superstition, vanitie and  
strife proceed from them who should be the greatest  
promoters of Knowledge, Truth and Peace. I will de-  
tain you no longer, if I have erred in what I have  
written to you, impute it to the largeness of my affe-  
ction to the Citie, which may possibly have intrenched  
upon my understanding in what I have said. Finally,  
brethren, farewell: Be perfect, be of good comfort, be of  
one minde, live in peace; and the God of love and peace  
shall be with you.

2 Cor. 13. 11.

Torke, March, 15.

1655.

Your affectionate servant

in the Lords work,

Edw: Bowles.



Matth. 5. 33, 34.

*Again ye have heard it hath been said by them of old time, thou shalt not forswear thy self, but shalt perform unto the Lord thine Oathes;*  
*But I say unto you, Swear not at all, &c.*



Have often had it in my thoughts to speak something concerning *Oathes*, a subject which (duely considered) would admit matter of humiliation and reformation to us and many more: and having this opportunity put into my hands, I shall deliver my self, taking the words of our Saviour which have been read unto you for my ground-work, which whosoever would understand, must diligently consider the scope of the place, and the persons he had to deal with, *viz.* the Jews, leavened with Pharisaicall glosses, and corrupt traditions.

Our Saviour was now in the exercise of his propheticall Office, and preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom and mending the Sect and opinion of the Pharisees, so be most opposite and prejudiciall to his intencion, he sets himself in this Sermon to pull down the righteousness of the Scribes, and Pharisees, that so he might bring in the righteousness which is of God by faith; and therefore tells them plainly, *that when ever their righteousness did exceed the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees, they should*

in no case enter into the Kingdom of God, Verse 20. Now because the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees was in better credit among the people than to be blasted with a bare assertion, Christ shows the vanity and defectiveness of it. In what it fell exceeding short of its pretence, which was, to fulfill the Law of Moses, which instead of fulfilling they destroyed. For as it is the common practice of erroneous persons when they can bring their opinions to the Scripture, they will wrest the Scripture to their opinions, as the Fathers speak of some who did *pertrahere Evangelium ad sententiam suam precipitium*; so the Pharisees seeing they could not raise their righteousness to the line of the Law, they brought down the Law to the level of their own righteousness; in particular, they restrained the Commandments which in themselves are spiritual and exceeding broad (reaching the thoughts and intents of the heart, all kinds and degrees of evil) to some outward actions, which in the strength of morall principles they might forbear, whose right Heirs are the Papists, who, resolved to establish a righteousness of works, and possibility of fulfilling the Law, will by no means grant that conscience is sin, but thereby their gall righteousness should be tainted.

But to return to the Pharisees with whom Christ had to deal, they restrained the seventh Commandment to the act of Adultery, Christ extends it to the wandrings of the eye and heart: they limited the sixth Commandment to actual murders, whereas Christ extends it to inordinate passion and ill language: so dealt they in this particular whereof we treat. They confined the third Commandment to perjury, whereas Christ extends it to the prohibition of rash vain swearing by the Creatures. And so I come to the words, onely I must first endeavour the determination of one Question, whether Christ in this discourse intend an abrogation of the Law, an addition to it, or onely an interpretation of it? Certainly not an abrogation of the morall Law, which he professes he came not to destroy, but to fulfill, Verse 17. Some would have it to be an addition, which opinion indeed hath the countenance of some of the Fathers; but the Socinians are most earnest in this conception, upon this ground, they will not admit of the satisfaction of Christ or justification

justification by his death; and for the wrong they do to his Priestly Office, they pretend to make amends in his Prophetically, and say that he came to improve and raise the Precepts of the old Testament, and give a more exact Law then was given by Moses, in the observation whereof our Gospell righteousness should consist. But we beleeve that our Lord Jesus only intended a restauration of the Law from the corrupt glosses and traditions of the Elders, with whom he deals in this discourse, not with Moses, who was faithfull in the House of God: for he professes that he came not to destroy the Law, which upon the matter he had done, if he had shewed it to be a short or crooked rule, but to fulfill it, or (as the word will bear.) to fill it up, by true and full interpretations. Christ fulfilled the Law both *practically* in obeying it; and *doctrinally* in making up those gaps which the Phariseall glosses and traditions had made in it. πληρῶσαι.

You have heard that it hath been said by them of old time, *οὐκ ἐγγίζετε*; or as some would have it, to them of old time: It may be here enquired what times and persons Christ hath reference to in this passage; some may think that he hath respect unto Moses and the people of Israel to whom he spake things to this purpose: *Lev. 19. 13. Ye shall not swear by my Name falsely, &c.* But I beleeve that an antiquity of a much later date is meant by this expression, even of those Elders mentioned, *Mat. 23. 2.* whose traditions the Pharisees complained were broken by Christs Disciples; for the word *ἐγγίζετε*, signifies sometimes that which is not long past, as *Mat. 19. 7.* And here take notice that after the Law and the Prophets there rose up a generation of men who were not content with the written word, but added the supplement of traditions, which though in the esteem of the Pharisees, *Act. 22. 3.* were ancient, yet very far short of true antiquity which was Moses and the Prophets; the counterpart of this dealing we find in the Church of Rome; who besides the *verbum scriptum*, will have a *verbum traditum*, a traditional word which they make equall to the Scripture in authority and esteem; thus the Council of Trent, *Traditiones ipsas tum ad fidem tum ad mores pertinentes pariter ac Scripturas suscipi & venerari. Ecclesia Romana.* And they will pretend much of antiquity for their practices, but it is a modern antiquity; (if I may so speak.) the *antiquity* of

of Christ and his Apostles they have no minde to deal with, nor yet that of the first three hundred years after Christ, unlesse it be some peeces which they may justly call theirs, because they have either forged or corrupted them: althoough we must acknowledge, that some of their corruptions began early in the Church, of which we have an intimation, *2 Thessalonians 2.7.*  
*1 John 2.18.*

What is it that was said by them of old time? *Thou shalt not forswear thy self, &c.* was it not well said? yes doubtlesse it was the truth; but not all the truth; take the words in themselves and it was well said, but take them with respect to the third Commandement, which thereby they intended to interpret, it was amisse; for they contain not the sum and substance of that Commandement, which reaches not onely to forswearing, but to vain swearing, swearing by the Creatures, and other abuses of the name of God, then frequent among the Jews, who (provided they did not swear by the name of God) thought themselves excusable if they swore frequently in ordinary communication, and that by the Creatures; and that some of their Oathes by the Creatures were not obliging, as we finde *Math. 23.16.* where the Gold and the Gift were by their covetousnesse advanced to be more sacred then the Temple or Altar.

But I say unto you, *Swear not at all.* These words seem to be a direct prohibition of all Oathes, and hence the Anabaptists have concluded the unlawfulness of swearing in any case, and it hath deceived some of the Ancients: *Hierome* himself saith upon this place, that *Evangelica veritas non recipit juramentum*; But I hope we shall without much difficultie evince, that it is not the intention of the Holy Ghost to forbid swearing in all cases by this expression, but that *particula omnino non ad substantiam sed ad formam referenda*, as *River* well observes. For we must know this in generall, that universall terms in Scripture are sometimes to be taken with restriction, as in that passage of *Paul*, *I became all things to all men*, that is, all lawfull things; and so I conceive must that place *Rom. 9.18.* be interpreted, *By the righteousness of one* (that is, Christ) *the free gift came upon all men to justification of life*; that is, upon all that have relation to the second Adam, as man-  
 kinde

kinde had to the first, viz. to be of his Seed. So that this expression [*swear not at all*] may be limited, notwithstanding its seeming universalitie, and must be expounded by the temper of those times in which it was spoken, and those persons to whom it was spoken; for where the Scripture speaks *ad hominem*, as it doth much in this place, their disposition and opinion must be considered, which was to swear ordinarily in their communication, when bare affirmations or negations would have sufficed: and because they had not onely a religious but a superstitious apprehension of the name of God, and would not use it when they might, they swore by the Creatures, and thought they were not much bound by such Oathes; so that all our Saviour intends, is this, Swear not as you are wont to do, or, as you think you may do; swear not at all by the Creatures: for the generall word [*not at all*] must be interpreted by the particulars enumerated, which if they had been omitted, or, if the name of God had been put among them, it must have been construed as a generall prohibition, which now it cannot be. And whereas this not mentioning of the name of God may seem to be supplied in that of *Jam. 5. 12.* where to the enumeration of some particulars this generall clause is added, [*Neither by any other oath*] it must be restrained to oaths of that kinde; for it were strange that the name of God should be intended and not mentioned in either of these Scriptures, which ought especially to be vindicated from profanation. If this Question need any further clearing, I shall mention another place, where under the single expression of swearing, not all swearing, but false, vain, and rash swearing is discountenanced, viz. *Eccles. 9. 2.* *He that sweareth, and he that feareth an Oath* are opposed; where he that sweareth, signifies a prophane swearer, and he that feareth an Oath; one that reverenceth, not one that refuseth it in all cases. So that you see it is agreeable to the scope and circumstances of this place, as also to other Scriptures, that this universall clause [*Swear not at all*] be interpreted with restriction to the vain, unnecessary customary abuse of swearing among the Jews.

The words thus explained, offer to our observation these two Propositions;

C

Propos.

*Propos. 1.* It is not utterly unlawfull to swear.

*II.* It is utterly abominable to forswear.

The later of these Propositions was never under question, the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees which reached not heaven, yet reacht thus far, *Thou shalt not forswear thy self.* The former hath endured some dispute, and therefore I shall endeavour to confirm it by some arguments.

1. The first taken from the consideration of the third Commandement, to which swearing is generally reduced, and indeed seems to be the main intent of it; it is there said, *Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain*: thou shalt not use it *ne frustra, nec falso*, for the word [*vain*] in Scripture signifies both. But it is not said, Thou shalt not use it, or lift it up, (as the word signifies) in any case; but the forbidding of the abuse doth implice, or rather enjoin a lawfull use of the name of God in swearing, which is the affirmative part of the Precept. And if the Morall Law (of which this is a speciall part) be of generall and perpetuall obligation to all men in all ages, (as without doubt it is) we yet remain not onely under the liberty, but in just cases under the duty of swearing.

2. It is a part of Divine worship, not a Ceremoniall or mutable part, there is no shadow of a shadow or Type in it, as one well observes, and therefore not out of date in the new Testament. It is so considerable a part of worship, that all worship is sometimes expressed by it, as at other times by calling upon the name of God. And the Apostle to the *Hebrews*, though his work be to shew the disannulling of all carnall and temporary ordinances among the Jews, is so far from putting swearing among them, that he seems to establish it as a standing Ordinance in that place, *Heb. 6.16.* where it is said, *That an Oath for confirmation is (not was) the end of all strife.* And indeed it is an action which (duely and reverently managed) doth give a great deal of honour to God, which is the proper end of worship; it gives him the honour of his Sovereigntie, Omnisience, Justice and Truth; it gives him the last appeal in all differences, which is a great Trust, and consequently a great honour; and, *Inquisitio post juramentum Deo irrogat injuriam*, It reflects upon God himself, when men will not rest in an Oath which was appointed for the end of strife.

*Psal. 63. 12.*  
*Ierem. 10. 25.*

3. The ground and occasion of Oathes yet remains; and the Law must remain till the foundation of it be removed. An Oath was appointed *in remedium defectus*, and those defects which swearing was appointed as a remedy for, yet continue such as the deceit, falshood, incredulity of men, the ground of *assertory* Oathes; the instability and changeableness of men, the ground of *promissary* Oathes. There are controversies yet to be decided, and will be, and so an usefulness of Oathes for the ending of them. Humane Societies cannot subsist without evidences of truth, and mutuall belief among men, which sometimes must be established by an Oath; and therefore *Julian* the Apostate taking it for grant, that the Christian Religion did forbid all Oathes, insulted upon it as false and ridiculous, because it did *Tollere principium humanæ societatis vinculum*.

Having spoken to the vindication of Oathes, it is not unnecessary to adde something concerning the regulation of them, & because I must not exceed the limits of a Sermon, I shall onely open that known place *Jer. 4. 2. Thou shalt swear the Lord liveth, in truth, in righteousness, and in judgement*: where we have the *form* and *qualifications* of a lawfull Oath; the *form*, *The Lord liveth*. In every Oath there ought to be an interposing of the Name of God; *Deut. 6. 13. Thou shalt swear by his Name*. To swear is to confesse a Deitie, as appears by comparing those two places, *Isa. 45. 23. To me shall every knee bow, and every tongue swear*; with *Phil. 2. 11. That every tongue should confesse that Jesus Christ is Lord*. And because we finde this expression frequent in Scripture, *The Lord liveth*, it deserves a little opening; to which purpose we may take notice of that passage in *Hebrews, 6. 16. Men verily swear by the greater*. And when the Lord sweareth, he doth it by that in himself which is the greatest, *his Life, and his Holinesse*, which are more then single Attributes: His *Life* is his fundamentall excellency, and his *holinesse* is more then an Attribute, for it is that complexion which runs thorow all his Attributes, and makes them beautifull. And this is the usuall forme in Scripture which Men and Angels have made use of. *Revel. 10. 6.* because of the peculiar accommodation of the life of God unto an Oath, for it imports that he sees and knows our appeal, that he abides ready to confirm the truth, or avenge the false-

*Deut. 32. 40.  
Psal. 89. 35.*

hood of him that swears. And I see not how swearing by any Creature can be exempted from Idolatry, if swearing be ( as it hath been proved ) a part of Worship. God complains that the Children of Israel swore by them that were no gods, *Jerem. 5. 7.* and to swear by Creatures, turns them into Idols, if they were not so before: to worship an Image and swear by a Creature, may be ranked together. And though some would excuse that expression of *Joseph*, [*By the Life of Pharaoh*] and tell us that the primitive Christians did sometimes swear *per salutem Imperatoris*, yet the former language seems fitter for *Egypt* then for *Canaan*, and the later favours more of Courtship then Christianity. There is indeed a passage of our Saviour, *Matth. 23. 21, 22.* where he seems to make it all one to swear by some Creatures, as to swear by God himself; for he saith, that *he that sweareth by the Temple, sweareth by him that dwelleth therein; and he that sweareth by Heaven the Throne of God, sweareth by him that sitteth thereon*: but the scope of our Saviour must be attended, who reproves the vain conceit of the Pharisees, who thought God was not concerned in those Oaths where his Name was not expressly mentioned; and tells them, that because those Oaths were reducible unto God, who accounted himself interested in every Oath, they could not be excused from perjury in the breach of them. *Pareus* expresses it briefly and well, that those Oaths were *formaliter vitiosa, sed finaliter obligatoria*: So that our Saviour doth not countenance those forms of swearing, but discountenance their great vanitie and folly in the construction of them; for an Oath taken by that which is no god, if he that swears, puts it in the room of God, it will be found to oblige. Thus much for the Form of an Oath, from which howsoever it hath pleased men to vary, yet it is good to have recourse to the first and purest use of Oathes, which was, to mention the Name of the Lord with lifting up the hand to Heaven; so *Abraham* ( as fit for our pattern as any man else ) *Genes. 14. 22.* *I have lift up my hand to the Lord, the Possessor of Heaven and Earth, that I will not, &c.*

Thus much concerning the Form, the Qualifications follow, *In truth, in righteousness, and in judgement.* *Hierome* gives this brief and clear interpretation of these words, There must be *veritas*

re, *justitia in causa, judicium in modo jurandi*. First, he that swears must have a principall eye to Truth, for the end of an assertory oath is to evidence truth, and of a promissory oath to engage truth: *veritas entis* must be looked to in the former, *veritas mentis* in the latter, and no room is left for equivocation, which crosses the very end of an Oath. It is certainly a most horrid impiety to call God to witness an untruth, who delights to be stiled *The God of truth*; it is an affront we should be ashamed to offer a Person of Honour, to make him a partner in our iniquitie. In brief, he that swears a falshood, doth insinuate, that God doth either not know the truth, or not regard it; but *his eyes are on the truth*, *Jerem. 5. 23*. Let those that swear falsely well consider it, lest a curse enter into their houses, as the Lord threatneth, *Zech. 5. 3, 4*.

2. He that sweareth must do it *in righteousness*, in a lawfull and just matter; if the oath be *promissory*, the thing sworn must be lawfull and good; not such an oath as *David* swore against *Nabal* and his house, *1 Sam. 25. 22*. or *Herod* to *Herodias*, *Matth. 14. 7*. If the oath be *assertory*, let it be with righteous and just intentions, to the furtherance of justice and charitie, and upon no other account.

3. *In judgement*, that is, wisely discerning the occasion and ordering the circumstances of his oath; for instance, he that swears in *judgement* will not swear in a triviall or sleight businesse; the Name of the Lord is great, wonderfull, and holy, and not to be made use of but in solemn and serious things. An honest man will not swear in a false matter, nor a wise man in a frivolous. Oathes and Lots are of like nature in this particular, both seriously to be used, and in cases of necessity. *Temere jurat qui aliter potest proximo consulere*, is a sober speech, and to be regarded; If by any other means we can provide for our neighbours good and safetie, it is rashnesse to swear on his behalf. To swear in *judgement*, is to do it with deliberation, and actual consideration of the importance of an oath; the Majesty, Truth, and Justice of him by whom, or unto whom we swear.

Having thus confirmed and illustrated the Proposition, a word of application will be needfull.

First, by way of confutation to those who utterly deny the lawfulness

Iam. 5. 12.

lawfulness of oathes in the times of the Gospell, and that under the countenance of this Scripture which I am insisting on, together with that of the Apostle *James*, already mentioned, which I hope are sufficiently vindicated from any such meaning, in the judgement of the considerate Reader: If men will run away with the sound of words, instead of the sense of them, and single out an expression of Scripture, and urge it against the evidence of severall plain places, speaking the contrary, it argues an Herericall disposition, more addicted to opinion than to truth. *Calvin* takes notice of such a temper, in his Commentary upon this place, his words are these, *Uns cum rixandi libidine crassam inscitiam produunt Anabaptiste dum, vocem unam morose urgendo, totum sermonis tenorem clausis oculis praterunt*: The Anabaptists by occasion of this Scripture discover (together with their perversnesse) grosse ignorance, while they srowardly urge one word, neglecting the whole frame of the discourse. It is said our Anabaptists (if they will admit of that name, which they must rather than we to gratifie them with the name of the baptized Churches, deny our own Baptisme) allow of oathes: It is well if it proceed from a soundnesse, and not from a latitude of Principles: But by denying the use of them God loses honour, and men come short (many times) of truth and justice. It is true, if men were as they ought, *yes* and *no* might suffice instead of Oathes. *Omnis fidelis sermo pro juramento est*, saith *Hierome*; but we must take men as they are, with their defects of faith, truth, and knowledge, and the remedy of those defects, which is an Oath, must still continue.

2. But because where there is one too scrupulous, there are many too profuse in the matter of oathes, a severe reprehension belongs to those who observe no rule in swearing; such are they who swear by the Creatures, *light*, *bread*, or any thing that comes next hand, whereby a man first abuses his own reason; for what ridiculous folly is it to call inanimate Creatures to attest any thing? what madnesse to curse ourselves by our blessings? Secondly, he abuses the Name of God, which ought to be interposed in an oath, by substituting any other thing in his room, which there is nothing in Heaven or Earth fit to supplie.

And

And thirdly, he abuses the Creature it self, by imploying it to an end dishonourable to its Creator, an use to which it never was appointed; and this may well be part of that burthen under which the Creature groaneth and travellet in pain, as the Apostle speaks *Rom. 1. 22.* and of that vanitie of sin and trouble which it is subjected to. To swear by Creatures below our selves, is to under-value our selves: *For men verily swear by the greater, Hebr. 6. 16.* To swear by Creatures above our selves, (as glorified Saints and Angels) is to overvalue them, for what or who are they that they should be to us in the room of God? They also who regard not truth, judgement, and righteousness in their oathes, what reproof is sharp enough for them? To swear falsely by the Name of the God of truth, how great a provocation is it? Those that swear falsely, that is, either that which they know to be false, or that which they know not to be truly, are highly guilty of offence against the God of truth, whose eyes are upon the truth, *Jerem. 5. 3.* and also against humane society, which is knit together by the bands of truth and justice. The Egyptians had so reverent an esteem of their Idols, which were but vanity, and a lie, that if any were found to swear falsely by them, they were adjudged worthy of death; and shall we make light of abusing the name of the living and true God? There is no person of honour and honesty but would look upon it with highest indignation to be called to attest an untruth; what shall we then think of the God of truth, will he not be very jealous for his honour, in such a case? It is sad to see and consider how often men are produced to swear contradictions, where one must needs be guilty of false-hood in swearing, unless, both parts of a contradiction can be found true, which is impossible. And that which adds to the mischief, is, that unrighteousness is bound up with untruth in the most false Oathes, and so both Tables are broken at once. Sometimes men swear falsely, out of malice, and revenge, but it is a strange revenge, to destroy a mans reputation, to wound his conscience, to hazard his salvation, that he may requite another. *Ob what folly and madness is in the hearts of the sons of men while they live, and after they go to the dead,* as the wise man complaines, *Ecclesi. 9. 3.* Others swear falsely out of a covetous principle, *loving the*

wages of unrighteousness, as Balaam did; but what profit is it to win the world, and lose a mans own soul, saith Christ, who knew well enough what the worth of both was, *Math. 16. 26.* such a man is like to come to *Judas* his reckoning; who dearly earned the reward of iniquity, *Act. 1. 18.* Others who think it base to forswear themselves for money, will yet do it out of respect to a Superior, or kindnesse to a friend; but for a man to pawn his soul in courtesie, is madnesse and not kindnesse, and most desperate folly for one to lay down his own conscience or comfort as a Bridge to make passage for another to his worldly advantages. But I shut up this admonition with that of the Lord by the Prophet *Zechariah, 8. 17.* Let none of you imagine evil in your hearts against his neighbour, and love no false Oath, for these things I hate, saith the Lord. *Odium terminatur ad non esse.* Destruction is the fruit of hatred.

And lastly, the number of them that swear but not in judgement, is exceeding great; alas, how few are there that understand an Oath, and fewer that consider it! Those that swear in common conversation, certainly swear not in judgement, they do it so frequently, so sleightly, that their understanding cannot exercise any deliberate act about it; they take so little notice of it that they will hardly be brought to acknowledge they have sworn; if they confesse it they will tell you it was before they were aware, and so are found witnesses against themselves, that they swear not in judgement: but if every idle word is to be accounted for, as our Saviour tels us *Math. 12. 36.* what shall we think of idle oathes, which signifie nothing but a profane and vain spirit, will not they inflame the reckoning exceedingly? The sons of men (especially great and noble persons) cannot endure to have their Names tossed up and down among vain men, or used upon sleight occasions: and will not the God of heaven take it in greater indignation that his Name [which is great, wonderfull, holy] should be made triviall or common, by the frequent usurpations of ignorant and wicked men, certainly he will not hold them guiltlesse that thus take his Name in vain: It is not the plea of custome that will excuse nor yet extenuate the sin. It is true, some places are so profane, that swearing is become the very dialect of the Town or Family where

where they dwell, and shall they escape by the commonesse of their iniquity, no surely neither nature nor custome which is the second nature are tolerable excuses for any evill, but rather aggravations of it. Sin is not the lesse but rather the more to be bewailed, because of the deep root it hath in our corrupt natures. In this glasse it was that *David* and *Paul* saw their sins to be above measure sinfull, *Psal.* 51. and *Rom.* 7. And the like may be said of custome, *altera natura*; it is so little capable of being pleaded by way of mitigation of the sinne of swearing, or any other iniquity, that it renders it the more mischievous and dangerous. The Lord by the Prophet *Jeremy* gives an account of the state of *Judah*, *Chap.* 13. 23. *Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the Leopard his spots? then may ye also do good who are accustomed to do evil.* But was this any advantage to them, that they were so accustomed to evil, that they could not leave it? No, for it follows *vers.* 24. *Therefore will I scatter them as the stubble that passeth away by the winde of the wilderness. This is thy lot, the portion of thy measures from me, saith the Lord.* Let men take heed of customary sins. If men will be wont to sin, God is wont to punish.

Others there are more deliberate in this wickednesse, and so more guilty; they think it a kinde of a gallantrie and gracefulness of speech to interlace it with Oathes and Excerations; nay, some are become so exceeding vain and vile, that they will study new-fashion'd Oathes, as well as cloaths, and so go down to destruction in the right mode: Concerning these persons I know not well what to say, but choose rather to stand and admire, first, the depth of wickednesse and madnesse in the heart of man, which casteth up such mire and dirt; and then the infinite patience of the God of heaven, who is highly sensible of such affronts and provocations, and easily able to avenge himself, yet forbears to execute his just displeasure. But let them who like raging waves of the Sea thus foam out their owne shame, and vent the superfluity of naughtinesse that is in them, know, that though God be long suffering, yet he will not alwayes suffer, his patience hath prefixed bounds; and though for some time there may be one event to the righteous and the sinner, to him that sweareth and him that feareth an oath, as saith the Preacher, *Eccles.* 9. 2. yet there is a day of the revelation of the

righteous judgement of God approaching, and then will the Lord put an everlasting difference betwixt the righteous and the wicked; *betwixt him that serveth God, and him that serves him not, Malach. 3. ult.* It may be such profane persons finde not the Curse entered into their houses, according to the threatening *Zach. 5. 3, 4.* but it is entred into their hearts, which is of worse consequence, for by their hardaesse and impeniteney they treasure up wrath against the day of wrath.

And though the persons mentioned do most notoriously offend against this rule of swearing in judgement, for they have no judgement in their goings or doings, yet they are not the onely offenders in this point; there are many who call others to swear, and are called lawfully thereunto; that rush upon oathes without due consideration: they consider not the weight of the matter, or the necessity of an Oath in the case. Every unnecessary Oath is a vain Oath, and litigious persons who occasion many Oathes for the decision of their needlesse controversies, will finde they have much to answer for; their sins against charitie by contentions, against justice by vexations, and against the Name of God by calling men to swear about that which is hardly worthy a mans going over the threshold to prove. And though *Erasmus* was too strict in saying, *Non est ingenui Christiani jurare pro rebus huius seculi, pro prediis & nummis;* yet the truth lies very near it, and that is, men should be very backward to swearing in such cases, and utterly averse if the difference may otherwise be determind. An Oath is rather to be reckoned *in necessariis quam in simpliciter bonis.* The command to swear by the Name of God, *Deuter. 6. 13.* is not like that of calling upon his name, but the meaning is, If there be a just occasion of thy swearing, then let it be by the Name of God, and not by any Idol or Creature.

Exed. 22. 11.

Others consider not the solemnity of an Oath, the Majestic and Dread of that Name which is invocated thereby, but lightly, hastily, and irreverently use the Name of God, which is full of provocation. It is sad to see how in Courts of Justice, where Magistrates are tender enough of their own Honour and Power, the Name of God is profaned with rude and irreverent swearing: what huddling of Oathes there is with very little sense or consideration

consideration of the weight and importance of them, which if administred with deliberation and solemnitie, would conduce much to the Honour of God, and the right end of an Oath, which is the serious confirmation of a Truth in question. And it would be no small degree of reformation among us in civill proceedings, if the number of Oathes were lessened, and those that must be taken were administred with more solemnitie, as all the parts of Gods Worship ought to be: Let me therefore put you my Lord Maior & the rest of the Magistrates in mind, that God hath intrusted you with a very great Treasure, which is *The glorious and fearfull name of the Lord your God*, which he is very tender of, and expects you should be so also, and expresse your regard thereto, by punishing unlawfull Oathes, preventing unnecessary Oathes, and duly regulating those which are lawfull and necessary, in order to truth and peace. The day is hastening upon us when we shall have no other refuge but the Name of the Lord, which is a strong Tower to the righteous, *Proverbs 18. 10* and how sad will it be to finde such a repulse as this, *What have you to do to take my Name in your mouthes, which you have profaned and suffered to be profaned, for want of executing the Power and Trust committed to you by God and men?* Is not every mans particular burthen heavie enough for him to bear? Let us not then neither Magistrates nor Ministers (for we are most concerned) make ourselves partakers of other mens sins, by not discharging our dutie to them. This shall suffice I have spoken of the first *affliction*, wherein I have had more speciall respect to *affliction*. I come now to the second, which will more directly concerne *Oathes promissory*, such as you have taken this day.

*Propos. II. It is utterly abominable to forswear, or not to perform our Oathes unto the Lord.* The righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees which came short of the Law, and short of Heaven (as I have already said) yet reach'd thus far, that Oathes were to be performed; if Scripture were silent, the Law of Nature and Nations would speak plain and loud in this point, there being hardly any sin upon which they have set a fowler mark then that of perjury; I suppose because of the peculiar mischief and malignitie that it carries with it to humane Societies, which are preserved by truth and fidelity. *Apud omnes populos &c.*

Grot. de jure  
belli & pacis.

*ab omni epo circa pollicitationes et contractus maxima semper vis fieri  
jussu mandati.* I think it utterly superfluous to produce any thing  
by way of proof in so clear a point as this is, I only give this  
argument from the lesse to the greater, if it be generally look'd  
upon as unworthy to break a mans word or promise (as indeed  
it is, for it renders a man inconstant, if not unfaithfull) much  
more unworthy is it to recede from a promise strengthened and  
seconded with an Oath. It is worth the consideration that of  
*Paul. 2 Cor. 1. 17.* Where you find him exceeding solicite  
to preserve his reputation from the stain of lightnesse; *When  
therefore was I thus minded did I use lightnesse? or the things that  
I purpose do I purpose according to the flesh, that with me there should be  
yea, yea, and nay, nay? But as God is true, our word toward you was  
not yea, and nay:* And so it becomes every one that nameth the  
name of Christ, the faithfull and true witnessse, to have a tender  
respect to credit and conscience in the matter of Oathes and  
promises which is one speciall branch of that blessed exercise of  
keeping a good conscience void of offence toward God and toward men.

To this may be added the consideration of the strictnesse of  
God in this particular, how severe hath he been in reprehensions  
and punishments for the violation of *promissory Oathes*, though  
some excuse might have been pleaded for the breach of them.  
When *Saul* broke the Oath made by *Joshua* and the Princes of  
the Congregation to the *Gibeonites*, *Joshua 9. 15.* he might have  
said it was made by his Predecessors, but not by himself; it was  
a surprize, a Covenant obtained by indirect and fallacious  
means, it seemed to clash with the injunction of God for de-  
stroying the Nations; & lastly, that he did it not out of revenge  
or self-interest, but in zeal to the people of God, the Children  
of *Israel*: but notwithstanding all these Pleas, the Lord took  
himself so much concerned in the breach, that he looked upon  
the House of *Saul* as a bloody House for this cause, and took  
sharp recompense for his transgression, *2 Sam. 21. 1, 2, &c.* Ano-  
ther instance may be that of the King and Princes of *Judah*, who  
being overcome by the King of *Babylon*, entered into an Oath  
and a Covenant with him, which afterward they violated, by  
sending Ambassadors to *Egypt* for Auxiliaries, that they  
might get their neck from under the Yoke. For this also some  
thin-

thing might be pleaded, as, That it was a forced Oath, drawn from them in extremity, that it was contrary to the promises made to *Israel*, that it should be high above all Nations, contrary to the honour and interest of the Church of God to be under the oppression of strangers: should *Israel* be a servant, a home-born slave, and not deliver himself at his first advantage? But notwithstanding all this the Lord tells them, that though the oath was made to the King of *Babylon* that was his enemy as well as theirs, yet it was the Lords Oath: *Therefore thus saith the Lord, as I live surely mine Oath that he hath despised, and my Covenant that he hath broken, even it will I recompense upon his own head, and I will spread my Net upon him, and he shall be taken in my snare; seeing no Bands of mens making will hold him fast, I will make a snare for him in which he shall be surely held.*

But because notwithstanding the strictness of the obligation of promissory Oaths, there will be sometimes a necessity of dispensation, some explicatory Rules must be added, as,

1. An unlawfull Oath or engagement, I mean, that which obliges to a sinfull Act, a breach of any of Gods Commandments, must not be performed. *Juramentum non debet esse vinculum iniquitatis.* Ames. and therefore *David* did much better in breaking his Oath made against *Nabab* and his house by way of revenge, 1 *Sam.* 25. 22:23. then *Herod* did by keeping that rash and sinfull engagement made to *Herodias*, *Matth.* 14. 7, 8, 9. For though it may seem to reflect upon the obligation of an Oath, that in any case it should be remitted, yet it would be a greater dishonour to the nature of an Oath if it should be allowed to tie a man to the disobedience of Gods commands, and so have influence into sin. And therefore if any be so unwarrantably engaged, they must repent of the first sin in making such an Oath, and not adde a second in the keeping of it: for as we say of precepts, so we may of promises, *Præceptum inferioris non obligat contra potestatem superioris.* Neither precepts nor promises made against the lawfull power of our Superiours, (much lesse our supreme God himself) are binding. Naturall light reaches thus far, for we find in *Curtius* that *Nicomachus* having rashly sworn secrecy to *Dymnus*, when he understood the business to be an intended murder against the King, he denied

*Juravit David temere sed non implevit juramentum majori peccato. August.*

*Durand. lib. 2: dist. 39.*

*lib. 6: Cap. 7.*

that he was obliged by a religious Bond to a wicked Act, and revealed the matter.

2. An Oath binds not to impossibility, to swear that which is at the present impossible, is great rashness and folly; but a man sometimes finds it impossible to perform that which was possible when he engaged to it, but certainly with the possibility the obligation ceases, and it suffices that there be a willingness to perform, and a propensity to embrace an opportunity of fulfilling it when God shall render it possible and fit to be done; and here the Lord himself makes a dispensation by providence, as in the case of an unlawfull Oath he doth by Precept.

3. If the Oath be lawfull and possible, though it be extremely prejudicial, and inconvenient unto the person so engaged, he is not to dispense with the performance of it. This is made a character of a Citizen of Zion, that he sweareth to his own hurt, and changeth not; and it sufficeth not for an excuse of the breach, to say, *We did it rashly and upon mistakes*, for so might *Jotham* and the Princes of *Israel* have said concerning their Oath to the *Gibeonites*, which was an Oath of disadvantage to *Heathan*. *Saul* thought when in zeal to their good he brake it, and an Oath wherein they were surprized, yet they were obliged by it. And as for that dispensation which some allow in the case of prejudice to publike good, although I would not wholly reject it, for a man may pass away his own right when he cannot do so with the publike, yet it is to be admitted with very much caution and tenderness, because there is great danger least it open a gap to unjust and unnecessary violations of this religious bond, and be made a cloke to private interests as frequently it is, and therefore let it be a clear and indisputable good, and judged so to be by others rather than him that is to dispence with his Oath about it. To keep an Oath with my own disadvantage is a demonstration how far I prefer the name of God, the honour of Religion unto my own concernments, and so an argument of sincerity toward God, or at least of honesty among men. Having gone as far as the limits of a Sermon will permit, I must refer to Treatises for that which is further desired concerning this subject, onely I must close with a word of application.

First, to those who have the power of imposing promissory Oathes upon others; that they would be exceeding tender, nay will say, backward and averse unto such kind of obligations, some have thought them utterly unlawfull and that our Saviour in this Text intends the prohibition of them, whom though we cannot agree to, yet we must acknowledge them to be exceeding dangerous; *Assertory* Oathes are the end of all strife, but *promissory* Oathes prove many times the beginnings and aggravations of strife, and if there ought to be so great care to avoid unnecessarily Oathes in case of assertion, certainly much more in case of obligation: to offend in the former is an act more transient, in the latter more permanent. Governours are ready to think it in their great security to establish themselves by Oathes, Covenants, & engagements; the use of them is not absolutely denyed, but the abuse and unprofitableness of them is evidently manifest; how easily men say even concerning these, *Let us break their bonds in sunder, and cast away their cords from us.* The policies of men have been pronounced vain in this case, and will be, so long as men purpose according to the flesh, ( as *Paul* speaks 2 Cor. 1. ) their words will be yea and nay; and especially to do it at such a time as this, a time of unsettlednesse and quick revolution, wherein it were too hard a task to bid a man lay hold of the Sails of a whirling Windmill, or stay the wheels of a running Chariot: the truth is, men will not be bound, much lesse will the Almighty by such Cords as these. *Canst thou draw out Leviathan with a Hook?* Job 41.1.

The like may be said in some degree concerning the Oathes taken by inferior Officers, by Tradesmen in Companies and Corporations: these Oathes are too much used, and too little observed among them: I think it is possible to hold forth a more excellent way both in the former case and this latter; if Magistrates would take fast hold of the people, and lay firm obligations upon them; it must not be by words, but actions; not by the peoples Promises, but their own performances: *Ubi non sanctitas, pietas, fides, instabile regnum est,* saith the Heathen Poet. conscientious persons who lay to heart the things of God, would be obliged by nothing more then due liberty and order in matters of Religion, which two howsoever they have been

kept at distance, are not onely possible but willing to be reconciled. *Faith* and *Order* are matter of rejoycing to an Apostle Col. 2.5. And as those who are for heaven would be most engaged by such means; so they who are for the earth, by consulting their profit & their quiet, both the one and the other by publike justice in which all are equally concerned. And as to the latter case, concerning the tying of Officers and others to their duties by the Bond of Oathes, it is indeed in it self the most sacred and strong tye, but it is not so to the generalitie of men, who are more awed by Penalties then by Oathes; and till the reverence of an Oath be restored to the world, that men shall regard their *Consciences* more then their *Purses*; it would be advantage to both Parties concerned in *promissory Oathes*, that penalties were many times imposed in the room of them.

2. I shall adde a word to those persons who are engaged in Oathes promissory. First, that we should look back upon all the solemn obligations of this kinde into which we have at any time entred, and seriously bewail before the Lord our great sin and folly concerning them; how rashly, slightly, implicitly, and inconsiderately have we adventured upon Oathes, Schollers in the Universities, Tradesmen upon their admissions to freedom, Officers entring on publike employments? and if we search our consciences it may be we shall finde little of them remaining, but the guilt; let us humble our selves and pray that it may be removed. And let us not think that sufficient, but account it our dutie to revive them, and so far as it is lawfull or possible, hold our selves obliged to perform them, though we have been incautiously and unwilfully surprized in them. Loose and libertine spirits are very forward to say, Let us break these Bonds in sunder, and cast away these Cords from us; let us look upon them as Almanacks out of date; but let such take heed they reckon not witho<sup>th</sup> the Lord, whose account shall only stand in the day of our great account, and if that be found upon the File, which we thought had been cancelled it will be a sad reckoning. And to invert that of the Roman Senatour: *Sinum Romanum vestri miserecat.* If you have no compassion of your selves, yet pity a poor Nation that lies mourning under Oathes; not onely the rash vain Oathes of profane and licentious men, but deliberate

deliberate promissory Oathes and Covenants so frequently and easily violated. I would not extenuate any sin, much less that of swearing, but the former Oathes are like man-naught, when the latter are as murder. *The Lord forgive our sin and heal our Land.*

And for the time to come let us as far as possibly we may avoid them, *Falsa juratio mala est, omnis periculosus.* But if there be just and necessary occasion for a promissory Oath, as sometimes there may, let us be exceeding circumspect in the taking of it, well weighing what we do and with what intention, and being once engaged, not to study evasions but executions of trust and promise. What can I say more then the Lord hath said in his perpetuall law: *The Lord will not hold him guiltlesse that taketh his Name in vain.* There is much said, but more intended then expressed, in these words; the Lord will deal with such a person as one who is deeply guilty of provocation.

Give me leave to be particular and plain. You my Lord Mayor and Sheriffs are under the band of an Oath, *That you will diligently execute the office you are called unto according to your skill, power and understanding.* Heroby you are tacitely obliged to do your utmost to understand the duty of your places, and expressly bound to execute them to the utmost of your skill and power, which is a great word and hard to be performed.

You the Aldermen, Common-Councell, and four and twenty (as you are called) are sworn to assist the Mayor in his office, to come to Councell at all times, when you are sent for, unless you have a just excuse; take heed of hindring instead of assisting, take heed of absenting your selves upon frivolous excuses; or things of lesse moment then that you are called unto; think not to be your own judges in the excuse, you will find another besides you, and above you, whose Judgment is according to truth. Think not that if you have not taken the Oath this year, you are not obliged, a former Oath binds you as long as you continue in your Station. Give not heed to evasions, but in all doubtful things take the safer course. You also take an Oath of secrecy, in which there is a snare, be carefull that you be not taken in it, but let prudence and conscience set a watch before the door of your lips.

You that are Freemen of the Citie are also under this sacred Bond, for preservation of the due rights and priviledges of the Citie, and to be obedient to the just and good government of the same. Take you heed also, and be exceeding circumspect, dispencc not with your obedience, where the Lawes of God, and the Lawes of the Land allow not a dispensation; think not it is left to your private determination, what is just and good government; you must take it as you find it, and do all things without murmuring and disputings, where the Lawes of your Superiors are not contrary to the Divine and Supreme Law. So shall you seek and procure the peace of the Citie, and of your own souls also.

You are sometimes called as Jurors, and sworn to make true Inquisitions and Presentments; not to present for hatred or malice, not to forbear Presenting for favour or reward, truly to trie Issues according to your evidence, not your private opinions and mistaken charitie. Take the counsell given by Moses to Israel, Take heed to your selves, and keep your souls diligently. In all things that I have said unto you be circumspect. I adde only this one consideration from the usuall close of your Oathes wherein you promise to do such and such things, *so help you God*; a small weightie and important expression. If the Lord help not, how sad is the condition of any of us, and shall we forfeit our Interest in it by breaking the Oathes we enter into? and give the Lord occasion to say when we lie for help unto his Name, *How can you expect help from me, remember the day when you said and swore, that as you expected help from me, you would do the things which you have not regarded.* Thus have I according to my measure given in that counsell which I desire may be acceptable to you. The Lord by his blessed Spirit supply the defects of my words, and of all our hearts and ways.

F I N I S.

